

US Jewish Population 1860

	Est. J Pop.	General Free Pop.	J % of Free Pop.
Union	125 - 170,000	22,000,000	0.6 - 0.7%
Confederacy	20 - 29,000	5,500,000	0.4 - 0.5 %

J Slave Owners	5,000 families	1.25%
	25% of J Families	25-30% of Free families
But	75-83 % in Charleston, SC	
	75 % in Richmond, VA	
	75 % in Savannah, GA	

Because Southern Jews lived primarily in cities, they were more likely to own domestic servants than to own slaves on large agricultural plantations.

Notable Exceptions:

Judah P. Benjamin New Orleans Belle Chasse Plantation
(5,000 acres) 140 slaves sugar cane & rice

Post-Civil War sub-divided into orange (& some other citrus) farms

Mordecai Moses Raleigh
(3,000 acres) 30 slaves cotton (1817-1824)

Inherited through his wife Margaret Hinton Lane, an Episcopalian

His son, Henry, shifted from corn & wheat

David Einhorn and Isaac Mayer Wise—the two foremost founding figures of American Reform Judaism—held opposing ideological and political stances during the Civil War. Einhorn was a radical abolitionist who championed the immediate end to slavery, while Wise was a peace Democrat who urged Jews to remain silent to protect the Union.

David Einhorn: The Staunch Abolitionist

- **Moral Stance:** Einhorn viewed slavery not just as a political issue, but as a severe moral evil entirely incompatible with Jewish values.
- **The Baltimore Conflict:** While serving at the Har Sinai Congregation in Baltimore (a prominent slave state), he vehemently denounced slavery from his pulpit and in his German-language periodical *Sinai*.
- **Forced Fleeing:** After his vocal condemnation of pro-slavery sermons in early 1861, a violent mob threatened to tar and feather him. He fled to Philadelphia, where he continued to loudly support the Union and the abolition of slavery.

Isaac Mayer Wise: The Advocate for Silence

- **Political Stance:** Wise resided in Cincinnati, Ohio—a vital border city bridging the North and South, where half of the readers of his newspaper, *The Israelite*, lived.
- **Policy of Neutrality:** He explicitly advised Jews to stay completely out of the political and North-South debates. He published an editorial declaring "Silence Our Policy," arguing that getting involved in the polarizing conflict would only draw unwanted antisemitism and risk dividing the American Jewish community.
- **Unionist but a Pacifist:** Wise opposed secession but was deeply skeptical that a Civil War was the answer, preferring a peaceful dissolution of the country over an armed conflict.

Their differing approaches to the war highlighted their distinct philosophies regarding how American Jews should integrate into society. While Wise advocated for a localized, unifying "American Judaism," Einhorn pushed for universal ethical imperatives like radical abolition.

The highest-ranking Jewish officer in the Union Army was **Major General Frederick Knefler**. A Hungarian immigrant, he enlisted as a private and rose to the rank of Brevet Major General, leading the 79th Indiana Infantry and serving notably under General William T. Sherman.

Several other Jewish officers achieved general-level rank in the Union Army during the Civil War:

Major General Frederick Salomon: A German-born civil engineer, he initially served as a captain in the 5th Missouri Infantry and commanded troops in major engagements, later becoming a division commander.

Brigadier General Edward S. Salomon: Commander of the 82nd Illinois Infantry, which included Company C, a unit with a heavy concentration of Jewish soldiers: he led his men at the **Battle of Gettysburg** (July 1–3, 1863). Salomon's unit faced fierce fighting on the first day at Gettysburg. Following the war, he served as Governor of the Washington Territory.

Brigadier General Henry Moses Judah: A West Point graduate and career military officer, he commanded Union forces at the Battle of Resaca.

Battle of Charles City Crossroads (Glendale), VA (June 30, 1862)

- **Benjamin Levy:** A 17-year-old drummer boy for the 40th New York Infantry, Levy's drum was destroyed by artillery fire. He grabbed a sick comrade's rifle to fight. When Union color bearers were shot down, he grabbed the flags and carried them through the charge. For his bravery, he became the first Jewish recipient of the **Congressional Medal of Honor**.

Siege of Vicksburg, MS (May–July 1863)

- **Colonel Marcus M. Spiegel:** One of the highest-ranking Jewish officers in the Union Army, Spiegel commanded the 120th Ohio Infantry. A German immigrant, Spiegel was widely respected by his men and successfully led his regiment through the Vicksburg Siege. His vast correspondence provides a primary record of a Jewish soldier's experience and ideological evolution.

Jewish Units in the Civil War

By: CSM Sam Yudin, CA ARNG

In 1862, there was a push for Jews to form their own military units in order “to show the country and the world that they appreciate the blessings they have enjoyed in this country.” Local newspapers published letters carrying this message to stoke this sentiment and public support. In the North Chicago and New York formed Jewish units. Jewish communities in the South formed two Jewish companies. There is little known about the companies formed in West Point, Georgia in 1861 and then in Macon, Georgia in 1862 for the defense of Savannah.

In New York’s 6th Senatorial District, Colonel William Meyer was recruiting to form a regiment called “Perkins Rifles.” His hope was that he would be successful in recruiting enough Jews so it would be a predominately Jewish unit. The local paper the Jewish Record challenged its readers to enlist so he did not have to “be compelled to seek support of men and means from others...” Ultimately Colonel Meyer did not have the

support of the community, which did not hold war meetings to support his cause. In Syracuse and Chicago, there was support that led to success. In Chicago, the Jewish community held a meeting on August 13, 1862 at the Concordia Club to pledge support “to organize and outfit a Jewish Company for the new 82nd Illinois Regiment.” Speeches were made, resolutions were drafted, money was raised, and men had volunteered. By the end of the week, the community raised \$11,000 and had 96 men join Company C of the 82nd Illinois Regiment commanded by Captain Jacob LaSalle.

In Syracuse, the Society of Concord Congregation pledged to recruit and equip one company. A war meeting was held on August 24, 1862 that continued for a week with a recruiting office. The rabbi “appealed to his congregation to demonstrate their love for the Union by meeting the goal.” By the end of the week, \$3,000 had been raised and enough men volunteered to establish the first company in the regiment. After Havdalah, the regimental commander swore in the men and marched them off with a band and cheers from the community.

Famously, the 65th Regiment of the 5th PA Cavalry, commanded by Colonel Max Freedman, consisted of many Jews, which led them to elect Captain Michael Allen as their Chaplain, in July 1861. As we have recounted in these pages, Captain Allen was forced to resign when it was found by the IG out that he was neither ordained nor Christian, in accordance with the Army Regulations concerning Chaplains. This, of course, led to President Lincoln and Congress changing the law, and Jewish Chaplains appointed.

Historians estimate that at least 10,000 to as many as 18,000 Jews served in both the Union and Confederate Armies. That equates to 4-5% of the Jewish population at the time. The fact that there were so few Jewish units is not an indication that Jews did not serve. To the contrary; they served in higher numbers in all other units as the majority showed “no desire for a segregated minority status.” Jews served in much higher numbers than their proportion in population percentage. The Anti-Semitic trope that Jews did not serve in the Civil War prompted the formation of what is now the oldest Veterans organization in the country, the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A., in 1896.

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The highest-ranking Jewish figure in the Confederacy was **Judah P. Benjamin**, who served directly in President Jefferson Davis's cabinet as **Attorney General (1861)**, **Secretary of War (1861–1862)**, and **Secretary of State (1862–1865)**. He acted as the Confederacy's chief strategist and is widely known as the "Brains of the Confederacy".

While the Confederate military did not have any Jewish generals, several Jewish men reached senior ranks as officers and commanders:

- ❖ **Abraham C. Myers**: A West Point graduate and the **Quartermaster-General of the Confederacy**. He essentially served as the chief of logistics and supply for the entire Confederate army.
- ❖ **Colonel Leon Dawson Marks**: Commanded the **27th Louisiana Infantry** and was appointed commandant of the Post of Vicksburg in 1863 before being fatally wounded.
- ❖ **Colonel Simon Levy**: Commanded the "Enfants Perdus" (Lost Children) battalion in the coastal defense of South Carolina.

- ❖ **Lieutenant Colonel Adolph Proskauer:** An immigrant from Prussia who led the **12th Alabama Infantry** and is remembered for calmly smoking a cigar while directing his men through the thickest of the Battle of Gettysburg fight.
- ❖ **Surgeon General David Camden De Leon:** Organized and directed the entire **Medical Department of the Confederacy**.

Battle of New Market, VA (May 15, 1864)

- ❖ **Moses Ezekiel:** The first Jewish cadet at the Virginia Military Institute, Ezekiel fought alongside his fellow cadets. After the battle, he was tasked with recovering the wounded. He became an internationally renowned sculptor. His works include the New Market Monument at VMI and his elaborate tomb at Arlington National Cemetery.

Both the Union and Confederate armies featured numerous ethnic and immigrant army units. Roughly 25% of all white Union soldiers were foreign-born. Regiments were frequently organized based on the shared language, nationality, or race of the volunteers.

- **Irish Units:** Both sides fielded Irish regiments, most notably the Union's famous **Irish Brigade** (featuring the 69th New York) and the **Confederate 10th Tennessee Infantry**.

- **German Units:** Germans represented the largest immigrant group in the Union Army. Several regiments and corps—such as the **11th Corps** and Pennsylvania's **74th Pennsylvania Infantry**—were predominantly German and fought in major engagements across the Eastern Theater.

- **Scandinavian Units:** The **15th Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry** was famously composed almost entirely of Norwegian and Danish immigrants.

- **French & Italian Units:** The Union **55th New York Volunteer Infantry** was known as the "Gardes de Lafayette" and consisted mostly of French immigrants. The **39th New York Infantry** (the Garibaldi Guard) featured Italian, Hungarian, and Swiss companies.
- **Native Americans:** About 20,000 Native Americans fought for both sides, with tribes like the Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek fielding their own brigades, predominantly in the Western and Trans-Mississippi theaters.
- **United States Colored Troops (USCT):** Segregated units of African American soldiers (both free men and formerly enslaved individuals) were officially formed by the Union starting in 1862. By war's end, nearly 180,000 men served in these units, making up about 10% of the entire Union Army.

To Christopher P. Wolcott

Head Quarters, 13th Army Corps.

Department of the Tennessee

Oxford, Dec. 17th 1862

HON. C.P. WOLCOTT

ASST. SECTY OF WAR

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Sir:

I have long since believed that in spite of all the vigilance that can be infused into Post Commanders, that the Specie regulations of the Treasury Dept. have been violated, and that mostly by Jews and other unprincipled traders. So well satisfied of this have I been at this that I instructed the Comdag Officer at Columbus to refuse all permits to Jews to come south, and frequently have had them expelled from the Dept. But they come in with their Carpet sacks in spite of all that can be done to prevent it. The Jews seem to be a privileged class that can travel anywhere. They will land at any wood yard or landing on the river and make their way

through the country. If not permitted to buy Cotton themselves they will act as agents for someone else who will be at a Military post, with a Treasury permit to receive Cotton and pay for it in Treasury notes which the Jew will buy up at an agreed rate, paying gold.

There is but one way that I know of to reach this case. That is for Government to buy all the Cotton at a fixed rate and send it to Cairo, St Louis, or some other point to be sold. Then all traders, they are a curse to the Army, might be expelled.

I am, Sir, Very Respectfully

Your Obt Servant

U.S. Grant

Maj Genl.

President Lincoln told General-in-Chief Henry Halleck to have Grant revoke General Order No. 11, which Halleck did in the following message: "A paper purporting to be General Orders, No. 11, issued by you December 17, has been presented here. By its terms, it expels [*sic*] all Jews from your department. If such an order has been issued, it will be immediately revoked.

Repudiation of order

After the Civil War, General Order No. 11 became an issue in the presidential election of 1868 in which Grant ran as the Republican candidate. The Democrats raised the order as an issue, with the prominent Democrat and **Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise** urging fellow Jews to **vote against Grant because** of his **antisemitism**. Grant sought to

distance himself from the order, saying "I have no prejudice against sect or race, but want each individual to be judged by his own merit." He repudiated the controversial order, asserting it had been drafted by a subordinate and that he had signed it without reading, in the press of warfare. In September 1868, Grant wrote in reply to Isaac N. Morris, a correspondent:

I do not pretend to sustain the order. At the time of its publication, I was incensed by a reprimand received from Washington for permitting acts which Jews within my lines were engaged in. ... The order was issued and sent without any reflection and without thinking of the Jews as a set or race to themselves, but simply as persons who had successfully ... violated an order. ... I have no prejudice against sect or

race, but want each individual to be judged by his own merit. The episode did not cause much long-term damage to Grant's relationship with the American Jewish community. He won the presidential election, taking the majority of the Jewish vote.

Reconciliation

In his book ***When General Grant Expelled the Jews*** (2012) historian **Jonathan Sarna** maintains that as President Grant became one of the greatest friends of Jews in American history. When he was president, he appointed more Jews to office than any previous president. He condemned atrocities against Jews in Europe, putting human rights on the American diplomatic agenda.

In 1874, President Grant attended a dedication of the Adas Israel Congregation in Washington with all the members of his Cabinet. This was the first time an American President attended a synagogue service. Many historians have taken his action as part of his continuing effort to reconcile with the Jewish community.

Grant has been estimated to have appointed more than fifty Jewish people to federal office including consuls, district attorneys, and deputy postmasters. Grant appointed Jewish citizen Simon Wolf Washington, D.C., recorder of deeds. Grant appointed Jewish citizen Edward S. Salomon territorial governor of Washington, the first time an American Jew occupied a governor's seat. Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise said, "Grant has revoked Grant's notorious order No. 11."